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CONSCIENCE

By HECTOR MALOT

With a Preface by EDOUARD PAILLERON, of the French Academy

BOOK 1.

HECTOR MALOT

HECTOR-HENRI MALOT, the son of a notary public, was born at La Brouille (Seine-Inferieure), March 20, 1830. He studied law, intending to devote himself also to the Notariat, but toward 1853 or 1854 commenced writing for various small journals. Somewhat later he assisted in compiling the 'Biographie Generale' of Firmin Didot, and was also a contributor to some reviews. Under the generic title of 'Les Victimes d'Amour,' he made his debut with the following three family-romances: 'Les Amants (1859), Les Epoux (1865), and Les Enfants (1866).' About the same period he published a book, 'La Vie Moderne en Angleterre.' Malot has written quite a number of novels, of which the greatest is 'Conscience,' crowned by the French Academy in 1878.

His works have met with great success in all countries. They possess that lasting interest which attends all work based on keen observation and masterly analysis of the secret motives of human actions.

The titles of his writings run as follows: 'Les Amours de Jacques (1868); Un Beau Frere (1869); Romain Kalbris (1864), being a romance for children; Une Bonne Afaire, and Madame Obernin (1870); Un Cure de Province (1872); Un Mariage sons le Second Empire (1873); Une Belle Mere (1874); L'Auberge du Monde (1875-1876, 4 vols.); Les Batailles du Mariage (1877, 3 vols.); Cara (1877); Le Docteur Claude (1879); Le Boheme Tapageuse (1880, 3 vols.); Pompon, and Une Femme d'Argent (1881); La Petite Soeur, and Les Millions Honteux (1882); Les Besogneux, and

Paulette (1883); Marichette, and Micheline (1884.); Le Lieutenant Bonnet, and Sang Bleu (1885); Baccara, and Zyte (1886); Viceo Francis, Seduction, and Ghislaine (1887); Mondaine (1888); Mariage Riche, and Justice (1889); Mere (1890), Anie (1891); Complices (1892); Conscience (1893); and Amours de Jeunes et Amours de Vieux (1894).'

About this time Hector Malot resolved not to write fiction any more. He announced this determination in a card published in the journal, 'Le Temps,' May 25, 1895--It was then maliciously stated that "M. Malot his retired from business after having accumulated a fortune." However, he took up his pen again and published a history of his literary life: Le Roman de mes Romans (1896); besides two volumes of fiction, L'Amour dominateur (1896), and Pages choisies (1898), works which showed that, in the language of Holy Writ, "his eye was not dimmed nor his natural force abated," and afforded him a triumph over his slanderers.

EDOUARD PAILLERON
de l'Academie Francaise.

CONSCIENCE

CHAPTER I

THE REUNION

When Crozat, the Bohemian, escaped from poverty, by a good marriage that made him a citizen of the Rue de Vaugirard, he did not break with his old comrades; instead of shunning them, or keeping them at a distance, he took pleasure in gathering them about him, glad to open his house to them, the comforts of which were very different from the attic of the Rue Ganneron, that he had occupied for so long a time.

Every Wednesday, from four to seven o'clock, he had a reunion at his house, the Hotel des Medicis, and it was a holiday for which his friends prepared themselves. When a new idea occurred to one of the habitues it was caressed, matured, studied in solitude, in order to be presented in full bloom at the assembly.

Crozat's reception of his friends was pleasing, simple, like the man, cordial on the part of the husband, as well as on the part of the wife, who, having been an actress, held to the religion of comradeship: On a table were small pitchers of beer and glasses; within reach was an old stone jar from Beauvais, full of tobacco. The beer was good, the tobacco dry, and the glasses were never empty.

And it was not silly subjects that were discussed here, worldly babblings, or gossiping about absent friends, but the great questions that ruled humanity: philosophy, politics, society, and religion.

Formed at first of friends, or, at least, of comrades who had worked and

suffered together, these reunions had enlarged gradually, until one day the rooms at the Hotel des Medicis became a 'parlotte' where preachers of ideas and of new religions, thinkers, reformers, apostles, politicians, aesthetes, and even babblers in search of ears more or less complaisant that would listen to them, met together. Any one might come who wished, and if one did not enter there exactly as one would enter an ordinary hotel, it was sufficient to be brought by an habitue in order to have the right to a pipe, some beer, and to speak.

One of the habitues, Brigard, was a species of apostle, who had acquired celebrity by practising in his daily life the ideas that he professed and preached. Comte de Brigard by birth, he began by renouncing his title, which made him a vassal of the respect of men and of social conventions; an instructor of law, he could easily have made a thousand or twelve hundred francs a month, but he arranged the number and the price of his lessons so that each day brought him only ten francs in order that he might not be a slave to money; living with a woman whom he loved, he had always insisted, although he had two daughters, on living with her 'en union libre', and in not acknowledging his children legally, because the law debased the ties which attached him to them and lessened his duties; it was conscience that sanctioned these duties; and nature, like conscience, made him the most faithful of lovers, the best, the most affectionate, the most tender of fathers. Tall, proud, carrying in his person and manners the native elegance of his race, he dressed like the porter at the corner, only replacing the blue velvet by chestnut velvet, a less frivolous color. Living in Clamart for twenty years, he always came to Paris on foot, and the only concessions that he made to conventionality or to his comfort were to wear sabots in winter, and to carry his vest on his arm in summer.

Thus organized, he must have disciples, and he sought them everywhere-- in the streets, where he buttonholed those he was able to snatch under the trees of the Luxembourg Gardens, and on Wednesday at the house of his old comrade Crozat. How many he had had! But, unfortunately, the greater number turned out badly. Several became ministers; others accepted high government positions for life; some handled millions of francs; two were at Noumea; one preached in the pulpit of Notre Dame.

One afternoon in October the little parlor was full; the end of the summer vacation had brought back the habitues, and for the first time the number was nearly large enough to open a profitable discussion. Crozat, near the door, smiled at the arrivals on shaking hands, and Brigard, his soft felt hat on his head, presided, assisted by his two favorite disciples of the moment, the advocate Nougarede and the poet Glady, neither of whom would turn out badly, he was certain.

To tell the truth, for those who knew how to look and to see, the pale face of Nougarede, his thin lips, restless eyes, and an austerity of dress and manners which clashed with his twenty-six years, gave him more the appearance of a man of ambition than of an apostle. And when one knew that Glady was the owner of a beautiful house in Paris, and of real estate in the country that brought him a hundred thousand francs a year, it was difficult to imagine that he would long follow Father Brigard.

But to see was not the dominant faculty of Brigard; it was to reason, and reason told him that ambition would soon make Nougarede a deputy, as fortune would one day make Glady an academician; and in that case, although he detested assemblies as much as academies, they would then have two tribunes whence the good word would fall on the multitude with more weight. They might be counted on. When Nougarede began to come to the Wednesday reunions he was as empty as a drum, and if he spoke brilliantly on no matter what subject with an imperturbable eloquence, it was to say nothing. In Glady's first volume were words learnedly arranged to please the ears and the eyes. Now, ideas sustained the discourse of the advocate, as the verses of the poet said something--and these ideas were Brigard's; this something was the perfume of his teaching.

For half an hour the pipes burned fiercely, the smoke slowly rose to the ceiling, and as in a cloud Brigard might be seen like a bearded god, proclaiming his law, his hat on his head; for, if he had made a rule never to take it off, he manipulated it continually while he spoke, frequently pushing it forward, sometimes to the back of his head, to the right, to the left, raising it, and flattening it, according to the needs of his argument.

"It is incontestable," he said, "that we scatter our great force when we ought to concentrate it."

He pressed down his hat.

"In effect," he raised it, "the hour has arrived for us to assert ourselves as a group, and it is a duty for us, since it is a need of humanity--"

At this moment a new arrival glided into the room quietly, with the manifest intention of disturbing no one; but Crozat, who was seated near the door, stopped him and shook hands.

"Tiens', Saniel! Good-day, doctor."

"Good-evening, my dear sir."

"Come to the table; the beer is good to-day."

"Thank you; I am very well here."

Without taking the chair that Crozat designated, he leaned against the wall. He was a tall, solid man about thirty, with tawny hair falling on the collar of his coat, a long, curled beard, a face energetic, but troubled and wan, to which the pale blue eyes gave an expression of hardness that was accentuated by a prominent jaw and a decided air. A Gaul, a true Gaul of ancient times, strong, bold, and resolute.

Brigard continued:

"It is incontestable"--this was his formula, because everything he said was incontestable to him, simply because he said it--"it is incontestable that in the struggle for existence the dogma of conscience must be established, its only sanction being the performance of duty and inward satisfaction--"

"Duty accomplished toward whom?" interrupted Saniel.

"Toward one's self."

"Then begin by stating what are our duties, and codify what is good and what is bad."

"That is easy," some one replied.

"Easy if you admit a certain innate regard for human life, for property, and for the family. But you must acknowledge that not all men have this regard. How many believe that it is not a fault to run away with the wife of a friend, not a crime to appropriate something that they want, or to kill an enemy! Where are the duties of those who reason and feel in this way? What is their inward satisfaction worth? This is why I will not admit that conscience is the proper guide of our actions."

There were several exclamations at this, which Brigard checked.

"What guide, then, shall men obey?" he demanded.

"Force, which is the last word of the philosophy of life "

"That which leads to a wise and progressive extermination. Is this what you desire?"

"Why not? I do not shrink from an extermination that relieves humanity of idlers that it drags about without power to advance or to free itself, finally sinking under the load. Is it not better for the world to be rid of such people, who obstruct the advancement of others?"

"At least the idea is bizarre coming from a doctor," interrupted Crozat, "since it would put an end to hospitals."

"Not at all; I would preserve them for the study of monsters."

"In placing society on this antagonistic footing," said Brigard, "you destroy society itself, which is founded on reciprocity, on good fellowship; and in doing so you can create for the strong a state of suspicion that paralyzes them. Carthage and Venice practised the selection by force, and destroyed themselves."

"You speak of force, my dear Saniel," interrupted a voice; "where do you get that--the force of things, the tatum? There is no beginning, no will; events decide for us climate, temperament, environment."

"Then," replied Saniel, "there is no responsibility, and this instrument

conscience, that should decide everything, is good for nothing. You need not consider consequences. Success or defeat may yet be immaterial, for the accomplishment of an act that you have believed condemnable may serve the race, while another that you have believed beneficent may prove injurious; from which it follows that intentions only should be judged, and that no one but God can sound human hearts to their depths."

He began to laugh.

"Do you believe that? Is that the conclusion at which you have arrived?"

A waiter entered, carrying pitchers of beer on a tray, and the discussion was necessarily interrupted, every one drawing up to the table where Crozat filled the glasses, and the conversation took a more private turn.

Saniel shook hands with Brigard, who received him somewhat coldly; then he approached Glady with the manifest intention of detaining him, but Glady had said that he was obliged to leave, so Saniel said that he could remain no longer, and had only dropped in on passing.

When they were both gone Brigard turned to Crozat and Nougarede, who were near him, and declared that Saniel made him uneasy.

"He believes himself stronger than life," he said, "because he is sound and intelligent. He must take care that he does not go too far!"

CHAPTER II

THE RICH MAN'S REFUSAL

When Saniel and Glady reached the street, the rain that had fallen since morning had ceased, and the asphalt shone clear and glittering like a mirror.

"The walking is good," Saniel remarked.

"It will rain again," responded Glady, looking at the sky.

"I think not." It was evident that Glady wished to take a cab, but as none passed he was obliged to walk with Saniel.

"Do you know," he said, "that you have wounded Brigard?"

"I regret it sincerely; but the salon of our friend Crozat is not yet a church, and I do not suppose that discussion is forbidden there."

"To deny is not to discuss."

"You say that as if you were angry with me."

"Not at all. I am sorry that you have wounded Brigard--nothing more."

"That is too much, because I have a sincere esteem, a real friendship for you, if you will permit me to say so."

But Glady, apparently, did not desire the conversation to take this turn.

"I think this is an empty cab," he said, as a fiacre approached them.

"No," replied Saniel, "I see the light of a cigar through the windowpane."

Glady made a slight gesture of impatience that was not lost upon Saniel, who was expecting some such demonstration.

Rich, and frequenting the society of poor men, Glady lived in dread of borrowers. It was enough for any man to appear to wish to talk to him privately to make him believe that he was going to ask for fifty louis or twenty francs; so often was this the case that every friend or comrade was an enemy against whom he must defend his purse. And so he lay in wait as if expecting some one to spring upon him, his eyes open, his ears listening, and his hands in his pockets. This explains his attitude toward Saniel, in whom he scented a demand for money, and was the reason for his attempt to escape by taking a cab. But luck was against him, and he tried to decline the unspoken request in another way.

"Do not be surprised," he said, with the volubility with which a man speaks when he does not wish to give his companion a chance to say a word, "that I was pained to see Brigard take seriously an argument that evidently was not directed against him."

"Neither against him nor against his ideas."

"I know that; you do not need to defend yourself. But I have so much friendship, so much esteem and respect for Brigard that everything that touches him affects me. And how could it be otherwise when one knows his value, and what a man he is? This life of mediocrity that he lives, in order to be free, is it not admirable? What a beautiful example!"

"Not every one can follow it."

"You think that one cannot be contented with ten francs a day?"

"I mean that not every one has the chance to make ten francs a day."

The vague fears of Glady became definite at these words. They had walked down the Rue Ferou and reached the Place St. Sulpice.

"I think that at last I am going to find a cab," he said, precipitately.

But this hope was not realized; there was not a single cab at the station, and he was forced to submit to the assault from Saniel.

And Saniel began:

"You are compelled to walk with me, and, frankly, I rejoice, because I wish to talk to you of a serious affair--on which depends my future."

"This is a poor place for serious talk."

"I do not find it so."

"We would better appoint some other time."

"Why should we, since chance has thrown us together here?"

Glady resigned himself to the inevitable, and was as polite as he could be in the circumstances.

"I await your pleasure," he said in a gracious tone, that was a contrast to his former one.

Saniel, who was in such a hurry a few moments before, now silently walked by Glady, whose eyes were on the shining asphalt pavement.

At last he spoke.

"I have told you that my future depends on the affair concerning which I wish to speak to you. I can tell you all in a few words: If I am not able to procure three thousand francs within two days, I shall be obliged to leave Paris, to give up my studies and my work here, and go and bury myself in my native town and become a plain country doctor."

Glady did not flinch; if he had not foreseen the amount he expected the demand, and he continued gazing at his feet.

"You know," continued Saniel, "that I am the son of peasants; my father was marshal in a poor village of Auvergne. At school I gave proof of a certain aptitude for work above my comrades, and our cure conceived an affection for me and taught me all he knew. Then he made me enter a small seminary. But I had neither the docile mind nor the submissive character that was necessary for this education, and after several years of pranks and punishments, although I was not expelled, I was given to understand that my departure would be hailed with delight. I then became usher in a small school, but without salary, taking board and lodging as payment. I passed a good examination and was preparing for my degree, when I left the school owing to a quarrel. I had made some money by giving private lessons, and I found myself the possessor of nearly eighty francs. I started for Paris, where I arrived at five o'clock one morning in June, and where I knew, no one. I had a small trunk containing a few shirts, which obliged me to take a carriage. I told the coachman to take me to a hotel in the Latin Quarter. 'Which hotel?' he asked; 'I do not care,' I answered. 'Do you wish to go to the Hotel du Senat?' The name pleased me; perhaps it was an omen. He took me to the Hotel du Senat, where, with what I had left of my eighty francs, I paid a month in advance. I stayed there eight years."

"That is remarkable."

"What else could I do? I knew Latin and Greek as well as any man in France, but as far as anything else was concerned I was as ignorant as a schoolmaster. The same day I tried to make use of what I knew, and I went to a publisher of classic books, of whom I had heard my professor of Greek literature speak. After questioning me he gave me a copy of Pindar to prepare with Latin notes, and advanced me thirty francs, which lasted me a month. I came to Paris with the desire to work, but without having made up my mind what to do. I went wherever there were lectures, to the Sorbonne, to the College de France, to the Law School, and to the School of Medicine; but it was a month before I came to a decision. The subtleties of law displeased me, but the study of medicine, depending upon the observation of facts, attracted me, and I decided to become a doctor."

"A marriage of reason."

"No, a marriage for love. Because, if I had consulted reason, it would have told me that to marry medicine when one has nothing--neither family to sustain you nor relatives to push you--would be to condemn yourself to a life of trials, of battles, and of misery. My student life was happy; I worked hard, and by giving lessons in Latin I had enough to eat. When I received as house-surgeon six, eight, nine hundred francs, I thought it a large fortune, and I would have remained in this position for the rest of my life if I had been able to do so, but when I took my degree of doctor I was obliged to leave the hospital. The possessor of several thousand francs, I should have followed rigorously my dream of ambition. While attending the mistress of one of my comrades I made the acquaintance of an upholsterer, who suggested that he should furnish an apartment for me, and that I might pay him later. I yielded to temptation. Remember, I had passed eight years in the Hotel du Senat, and I knew nothing of Paris life. A home of my own! My own furniture, and a servant in my anteroom! I should be somebody! My upholsterer could have installed me in his own quarter of Paris, and perhaps could have obtained some patients for me among his customers, who are rich and fashionable. But he did not do this, probably concluding that with my awkward appearance I would not be a success with such people. When you are successful it is original to be a peasant--people find you clever; but before success comes to you it is a disgrace. He furnished me an apartment in a very respectable house in the Rue Louis-le-Grand. When I went into it I had debts to the amount of ten thousand francs behind me, the interest on this sum, the rent of two thousand four hundred francs, not a sou in my pocket, not a relative--"

"That was courageous."

"I did not know that in Paris everything is accomplished through influence, and I imagined that an intelligent man could make his way without assistance. I was to learn by experience. When a new doctor arrives anywhere his brother doctors do not receive him with much sympathy. 'What does this intruder want?' 'Are there not enough of us

already?' He is watched, and the first patient that he loses is made use of as an example of his ignorance or imprudence, and his position becomes uncomfortable. The chemists of my quarter whom I called upon did not receive me very warmly; they made me feel the distance that separates an honorable merchant from a beggar, and I was given to understand that they could patronize me only on condition that I ordered the specialties that they wished to profit by--iron from this one and tar from that. On commencing to practise I had as patients only the people of the quarter, whose principle was never to pay a doctor, and who wait for the arrival of a new one in order that they may be rid of the old one and this sort is numerous everywhere. It happened that my concierge was from Auvergne like myself, and he considered it his duty to make me give free attendance to all those from our country that he could find in the quarter and everywhere else, so that I had the patriotic satisfaction of seeing all the charcoal-dealers from Auvergne sprawling in my beautiful armchairs. Finally, by remaining religiously at home every Sunday in summer, while the other doctors were away, by rising quickly at night every time my bell rang, I was able to acquire a practice among a class of people who were more reasonable and satisfactory. I obtained a prize at the Academy. At the same time I delivered, at a moderate price, lectures in anatomy at schools on the outskirts of the city; I gave lessons; I undertook all the anonymous work of the book trade and of journalism that I could find. I slept five hours a day, and in four years I had decreased my debt seven thousand francs. If my upholsterer wished to be paid I could have it arranged, but that was not his intention. He wishes to take his furniture that is not worn out, and to keep the money that he has received. If I do not pay these three thousand francs in a few days I shall be turned into the street. To tell the truth, I shall soon have a thousand francs, but those who owe it to me are not in Paris, or will pay in January. Behold my situation! I am desperate because there is no one to whom I can apply; those whom I have asked for money have not listened to me; I have told you that I have no relatives, and neither have I any friends--perhaps because I am not amiable. And then I thought of you. You know me. You know that people say I have a future before me. At the end of three months I shall be a doctor in the hospitals; my competitors admit that I shall not miss admission; I have undertaken some experiments that will, perhaps, give me fame. Will you give me your hand?"

Glady extended it toward him. "I thank you for having applied to me; it is a proof of confidence that touches me." He pressed the hand that he had taken with some warmth. "I see that you have divined the sentiments of esteem with which you have inspired me."

Saniel drew a long breath.

"Unfortunately," continued Glady, "I cannot do what you desire without deviating from my usual line of conduct. When I started out in life I lent to all those who appealed to me, and when I did not lose my friends I lost my money. I then took an oath to refuse every one. It is an oath that I cannot break. What would my old friends say if they learned that I did for a young man what I have refused to do for them?"

"Who would know it?"

"My conscience."

They had reached the Quai Voltaire, where fiacres were stationed.

"At last here are some cabs," Gladly said. "Pardon me for leaving you, but I am in a hurry."

CHAPTER III

A LAST RESORT

Gady entered the cab so quickly that Saniel remained staring at the sidewalk, slightly dazed. It was only when the door closed that he understood.

"His conscience!" he murmured. "Behold them! Tartufes!"

After a moment of hesitation, he continued his way and reached the bridge of Saints-Peres, but he walked with doubtful steps, like a man who does not know where he is going. Presently he stopped, and, leaning his arms on the parapet, watched the sombre, rapidly flowing Seine, its small waves fringed with white foam. The rain had ceased, but the wind blew in squalls, roughening the surface of the river and making the red and green lights of the omnibus boats sway in the darkness. The passers-by came and went, and more than one examined him from the corner of the eye, wondering what this tall man was doing there, and if he intended to throw himself into the water.

And why not? What better could he do?

And this was what Saniel said to himself while watching the flowing water. One plunge, and he would end the fierce battle in which he had so madly engaged for four years, and which would in the end drive him mad.

It was not the first time that this idea of ending everything had tempted him, and he only warded it off by constantly inventing combinations which it seemed to him at the moment might save him. Why yield to such a temptation before trying everything? And this was how he happened to appeal to Gladly. But he knew him, and knew that his avarice, about which every one joked, had a certain reason for its existence. However, he said to himself that if the landed proprietor obstinately refused a friendly loan, which would only pay the debts of youth, the poet would willingly fill the role of Providence and save from shipwreck, without risking anything, a man with a future, who, later, would pay him back. It was with this hope that he risked a refusal. The landed proprietor replied; the poet was silent. And now there was nothing to expect from any one. Gladly was his last resort.

In explaining his situation to Gladly he lightened the misery instead of exaggerating it. For it was not only his upholsterer that he owed, but also his tailor, his bootmaker, his coal-dealer, his concierge, and all those with whom he had dealings. In reality, his creditors had not harassed him very much until lately, but this state of affairs would not last when they saw him prosecuted; they also would sue him, and how could he defend himself? How should he live? His only resource would be to return to the Hotel du Senat, where even they would not leave him in peace, or to his native town and become a country doctor. In either case it was renouncing all his ambitions. Would it not be better to die?

What good was life if his dreams were not realized--if he had nothing that he wanted?

Like many who frequently come in contact with death, life in itself was a small thing to him--his own life as well as that of others; with Hamlet he said: "To die, to sleep, no more," but without adding: "To die, to sleep, perchance to dream," feeling certain that the dead do not dream; and what is better than sleep to those who have had a hard life?

He was absorbed in thought when something came between him and the flaring gaslight, and threw a shadow over him that made him straighten himself up. What was it? Only a policeman, who came and leaned against the parapet near him.

He understood. His attitude was that of a man who contemplates throwing himself into the river, and the policeman had placed himself there in order to prevent it.

"Thanks!" he said to the astonished man.

He continued his way, walking quickly, but hearing distinctly the steps of the policeman following him, who evidently took him for a madman who must be watched.

When he left the bridge of Saints-Peres for the Place du Carrousel this surveillance ceased, and he could then indulge freely in reflection--at least as freely as his trouble and discouragement permitted.

"The weak kill themselves; the strong fight to their last breath."

And, low as he was, he was not yet at his last breath.

When he decided to appeal to Gladly he had hesitated between him and a usurer named Caffie, whom he did not know personally, but whom he had heard spoken of as a rascal who was interested in all sorts of affairs, preferring the bad to the good--of successions, marriages, interdictions, extortions; and if he had not been to him it was for fear of being refused, as much as from the dread of putting himself in such hands in case of meeting with compliance. But these scruples and these fears were useless now; since Gladly failed him, cost what it might and happen what would, he must go to this scamp for assistance.

He knew that Caffie lived in the Rue Sainte-Anne, but he did not know the number. He had only to go to one of his patients, a wine-merchant in the Rue Therese, to find his address in the directory. It was but a step, and he decided to run the risk; there was need of haste. Discouraged by all the applications that he had made up to this time, disheartened by betrayed hopes, irritated by rebuffs, he did not deceive himself as to the chances of this last attempt, but at least he would try it, slight though the hope of success might be.

It was an old house where Caffie lived, and had been formerly a private hotel; it was composed of two wings, one on the street, the other on an inside court. A porte cochere gave access to this court, and under its roof, near the staircase, was the concierge's lodge. Saniel knocked at the door in vain; it was locked and would not open. He waited several minutes, and in his nervous impatience walked restlessly up and down the court. At last an old woman appeared carrying a small wax taper. She was feeble and bent, and began to excuse herself; she was alone and could not be everywhere at the same time, in her lodge and lighting the lamps on the stairways. Caffie lived on the first floor, in the wing on the street.

Saniel mounted the stairs and rang the bell. A long time passed, or at least it seemed long to him, before there was an answer. At last he heard a slow and heavy step on the tiled floor and the door was opened, but held by a hand and a foot.

"What do you wish?"

"Monsieur Caffie."

"I am he. Who are you?"

"Doctor Saniel."

"I have not sent for a doctor."

"It is not as doctor that I am here, but as client."

"This is not the hour when I receive clients."

"But you are at home."

"That is a fact!"

And Caffie, concluding to open the door, asked Saniel to enter, and then closed it.

"Come into my office."

They were in a small room filled with papers that had only an old desk and three chairs for furniture; it communicated with the office of the business man, which was larger, but furnished with the same simplicity and strewn with scraps of paper that had a mouldy smell.

"My clerk is ill just now," Caffie said, "and when I am alone I do not like to open the door."

After giving this excuse he offered Saniel a chair, and, seating himself before his desk, lighted by a lamp from which he had taken the shade, he said:

"Doctor, I am ready to listen to you."

He replaced the shade on the lamp.

Saniel made his request concisely, without the details that he had entered into with Glady. He owed three thousand francs to the upholsterer who had furnished his apartment, and as he could not pay immediately he was in danger of being prosecuted.

"Who is the upholsterer?" Caffie asked, while holding his left jaw with his right hand.

"Jardine, Boulevard Haussmann."

"I know him. It is his trade to take back his furniture in this way, after three quarters of the sum has been paid, and he has become rich at it. How much money have you already paid of this ten thousand francs?"

"Including the interest and what I have paid in instalments, nearly twelve thousand francs."

"And you still owe three thousand?"

"Yes."

"That is nice."

Caffie seemed full of admiration for this manner of proceeding.

"What guarantee have you to offer for this loan of three thousand francs?"

"No other than my present position, I confess, and above all, my future."

At Caffie's request he explained his plans and prospects for the future, while the business man, with his cheek resting on his hand, listened, and from time to time breathed a stifled sigh, a sort of groan.

"Hum! hum!" he said when Saniel finished his explanation. "You know, my dear friend, you know:

To fools alone the future's smile unchangeable appears,
For Friday's laughter Sunday's sun may change to bitter tears."

"It is Sunday with you, my dear sir."

"But I am not at the end of my life nor at the end of my energy, and I assure you that my energy makes me capable of many things."

"I do not doubt it; I know what energy can do. Tell a Greek who is dying of hunger to go to heaven and he will go

Graeculus esuriens in coelum, jusseris, ibit."

"But I do not see that you have started for heaven."

A smile of derision, accompanied by a grimace, crossed Caffie's face. Before becoming the usurer of the Rue Sainte-Anne, whom every one called a rascal, he had been attorney in the country, deputy judge, and if unmerited evils had obliged him to resign and to hide the unpleasant circumstances in Paris, he never lost an opportunity to prove that by education he was far above his present position. Finding this new client a man of learning, he was glad to make quotations that he thought would make him worthy of consideration.

"It is, perhaps, because I am not Greek," Saniel replied; "but I am an Auvergnat, and the men of my country have great physical strength."

Caffie shook his head.

"My dear sir," he said, "I might as well tell you frankly that I do not believe the thing can be done. I would do it myself willingly, because I read intelligence in your face, and resolution in your whole person, which inspire me with confidence in you; but I have no money to put into such speculations. I can only be, as usual, a go-between--that is to say, I can propose the loan to one of my clients, but I do not know one who would be contented with the guarantee of a future that is more or less uncertain. There are so many doctors in Paris who are in your position."

Saniel rose.

"Are you going?" cried Caffie.

"But--"

"Sit down, my dear sir! It is no use to throw the handle after the axe. You make me a proposition, and I show you the difficulties in the way, but I do not say there is no way to extricate you from embarrassment. I must look around. I have known you only a few minutes; but it does not take long to appreciate a man like you, and, frankly, you inspire me with great interest."

What did he wish? Saniel was not simple enough to be caught by words, nor was he a fop who accepts with gaping mouth all the compliments addressed to him. Why did he inspire a sudden interest in this man who had the reputation of pushing business matters to extremes? He would find out. In the mean time he would be on his guard.

"I thank you for your sympathy," he said.

"I shall prove to you that it is real, and that it may become useful. You come to me because you want three thousand francs. I hope I may find them for you, and I promise to try, though it will be difficult, very difficult. They will make you secure for the present. But will they assure your future? that is, will they permit you to continue the important works of which you have spoken to me, and on which your future depends? No. Your struggles will soon begin again. And you must shake yourself clear from such cares in order to secure for yourself the liberty that is indispensable if you wish to advance rapidly. And to obtain this freedom from cares and this liberty, I see only one way-- you must marry."

CHAPTER IV

'TWIXT THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP SEA

Saniel, who was on his guard and expected some sort of roguery from this man, had not foreseen that these expressions of interest were leading up to a proposal of marriage, and an exclamation of surprise escaped him. But it was lost in the sound of the door-bell, which rang at that moment.

Caffie rose. "How disagreeable it is not to have a clerk!" he said.

He went to open the door with an eagerness that he had not shown to Saniel, which proved that he had no fear of admitting people when he was not alone.

It was a clerk from the bank.

"You will permit me," Caffie said, on returning to his office. "It will take but an instant."

The clerk took a paper from his portfolio and handed it to Caffie.

Caffie drew a key from the pocket of his vest, with which he opened the iron safe placed behind his desk, and turning his back to Saniel and the clerk counted the bills which they heard rustle in his hands. Presently he rose, and closing the door of the safe he placed under the lamp the package of bills that he had counted. The clerk then counted them, and placing them in his portfolio took his leave.

"Close the door when you go out," Caffie said, who was already seated in his arm-chair.

"Do not be afraid."

When the clerk was gone Caffie apologized for the interruption.

"Let us continue our conversation, my dear sir. I told you that there is only one way to relieve you permanently from embarrassment, and that way you will find is in a good marriage, that will place 'hic et nunc' a reasonable sum at your disposal."

"But it would be folly for me to marry now, when I have no position to offer a wife."

"And your future, of which you have just spoken with so much assurance, have you no faith in that?"

"An absolute faith--as firm to-day as when I first began the battle of life, only brighter. However, as others have not the same reasons that I have to hope and believe what I hope and believe, it is quite natural that they should feel doubts of my future. You felt it yourself instantly in not finding it a good guarantee for the small loan of three thousand francs."

"A loan and marriage are not the same thing. A loan relieves you temporarily, and leaves you in a state to contract several others successively, which, you must acknowledge, weakens the guarantee that you offer. While a marriage instantly opens to you the road that your ambition wishes to travel."

"I have never thought of marriage."

"If you should think of it?"

"There must be a woman first of all."

"If I should propose one, what would you say?"

"But--"

"You are surprised?"

"I confess that I am."

"My dear sir, I am the friend of my clients, and for many of them--I dare to say it--a father. And having much affection for a young woman, and for the daughter of one of my friends, while listening to you I thought that one or the other might be the woman you need. Both have fortunes, and both possess physical attractions that a handsome man like yourself has a right to demand. And for the rest, I have their photographs, and you may see for yourself what they are."

He opened a drawer in his desk, and took from it a package of photographs. As he turned them over Sanieel saw that they were all portraits of women. Presently he selected two and handed them to Sanieel.

One represented a woman from thirty-eight to forty years, corpulent, robust, covered with horrible cheap jewelry that she had evidently put on

for the purpose of being photographed. The other was a young girl of about twenty years, pretty, simply and elegantly dressed, whose distinguished and reserved physiognomy was a strong contrast to the first portrait.

While Sanial looked at these pictures Caffie studied him, trying to discover the effect they produced.

"Now that you have seen them," he said, "let us talk of them a little. If you knew me better, my dear sir, you would know that I am frankness itself, and in business my principle is to tell everything, the good and the bad, so that my clients are responsible for the decisions they make. In reality, there is nothing bad about these two persons, because, if there were, I would not propose them to you. But there are certain things that my delicacy compels me to point out to you, which I do frankly, feeling certain that a man like you is not the slave of narrow prejudices."

An expression of pain passed over his face, and he clasped his jaw with both hands.

"You suffer?" Sanial asked.

"Yes, from my teeth, cruelly. Pardon me that I show it; I know by myself that nothing is more annoying than the sight of the sufferings of others."

"At least not to doctors."

"Never mind; we will return to my clients. This one"--and he touched the portrait of the bejewelled woman--"is, as you have divined already, a widow, a very amiable widow. Perhaps she is a little older than you are, but that is nothing. Your experience must have taught you that the man who wishes to be loved, tenderly loved, pampered, caressed, spoiled, should marry a woman older than himself, who will treat him as a husband and as a son. Her first husband was a careful merchant, who, had he lived, would have made a large fortune in the butcher business"--he mumbled this word instead of pronouncing it clearly--"but although he died just at the time when his affairs were beginning to develop, he left twenty thousand pounds' income to his wife. As I have told you what is good, I must tell you what is to be regretted. Carried away by gay companions, this intelligent man became addicted to intemperance, and from drinking at saloons she soon took to drinking at home, and his wife drank with him. I have every reason to believe that she has reformed; but, if it is otherwise, you, a doctor, can easily cure her--"

"You believe it?"

"Without doubt. However, if it is impossible, you need only let her alone, and her vice will soon carry her off; and, as the contract will be made according to my wishes in view of such an event, you will find yourself invested with a fortune and unencumbered with a wife."

"And the other?" Saniel said, who had listened silently to this curious explanation of the situation that Caffie made with the most perfect good-nature. So grave were the circumstances that he could not help being amused at this diplomacy.

"I expected your demand," replied the agent with a shrewd smile. "And if I spoke of this amiable widow it was rather to acquit my conscience than with any hope of succeeding. However free from prejudices one may be, one always retains a few. I understand yours, and more than that, I share them. Happily, what I am now about to tell you is something quite different. Take her photograph, my dear sir, and look at it while I talk. A charming face, is it not? She has been finely educated at a fashionable convent. In a word, a pearl, that you shall wear. And now I must tell you the flaw, for there is one. Who is blameless? The daughter of one of our leading actresses, after leaving the convent she returned to live with her mother. It was there, in this environment--ahem! ahem!--that an accident happened to her. To be brief, she has a sweet little child that the father would have recognized assuredly, had he not been already married. But at least he has provided for its future by an endowment of two hundred thousand francs, in such a way that whoever marries the mother and legitimizes the child will enjoy the interest of this sum until the child's majority. If that ever arrives--these little creatures are so fragile! You being a physician, you know more about that than any one. In case of an accident the father will inherit half the money from his son; and if it seems cruel for an own father to inherit from his own son, it is quite a different thing when it is a stranger who receives the fortune. This is all, my dear sir, plainly and frankly, and I will not do you the injury to suppose that you do not see the advantages of what I have said to you without need of my insisting further. If I have not explained clearly,"

"But nothing is more clear."

"--it is the fault of this pain that paralyzes me."

And he groaned while holding his jaw.

"You have a troublesome tooth?" Saniel said, with the tone of a physician who questions a patient.

"All my teeth trouble me. To tell the truth, they are all going to pieces."

"Have you consulted a doctor?"

"Neither a doctor nor a dentist. I have faith in medicine, of course; but when I consult doctors, which seldom happens, I notice that they think much more of their own affairs than of what I am saying, and that keeps me away from them. But, my dear sir, when a client consults me, I put myself in his place."

While he spoke, Saniel examined him, which he had not done until this moment, and he saw the characteristic signs of rapid consumption. His

clothes hung on him as if made for a man twice his size, and his face was red and shining, as if he were covered with a coating of cherry jelly.

"Will you show me your teeth?" he asked. "It may be possible to relieve your sufferings."

"Do you think so?"

The examination did not last long.

"Your mouth is often dry, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You are often thirsty?"

"Always."

"Do you sleep well?"

"No."

"Your sight troubles you?"

"Yes."

"Have you a good appetite?"

"Yes, I eat heartily; and the more I eat the thinner I become. I am turning into a skeleton."

"I see that you have scars from boils on the back of your neck."

"They made me suffer enough, the rascals; but they are gone as they came. Hang it, one is no longer young at seventy-two years; one has small vexations. They are small vexations, are they not?"

"Certainly. With some precautions and a diet that I shall prescribe, if you wish, you will soon be better. I will give you a prescription that will relieve your toothache."

"We will talk of this again, because we shall have occasion to meet if, as I presume, you appreciate the advantages of the proposition that I have made you."

"I must have time to reflect."

"Nothing is more reasonable. There is no hurry."

"But I am in a hurry because, if I do not pay Jardine, I shall find myself in the street, which would not be a position to offer to a wife."

"In the street? Oh, things will not come to such a pass as that! What

are the prosecutions?"

"They will soon begin; Jardine has already threatened me."

"They are going to begin? Then they have not begun. If he does, as we presume he will, proceed by a replevin, we shall have sufficient time before the judgment. Do you owe anything to your landlord?"

"The lease expired on the fifteenth."

"Do not pay it."

"That is easy; it is the only thing that is easy for me to do."

"It is an obstacle in the way of your Jardine, and may stop him a moment. We can manage this way more easily. The important thing is to warn me as soon as the fire begins. 'Au revoir', my dear Sir."

CHAPTER V

A CHARMING VISITOR

Although Saniel had had no experience in business, he was not simple enough not to know that in refusing him this loan Caffie meant to make use of him.

"It is very simple," he said to himself, as he went downstairs. "He undertakes to manage my affairs, and in such a way that some day I shall have to save myself by marrying that charming girl. What a scoundrel!"

However, the situation was such that he was glad to avail himself of the assistance of this scoundrel. At least, some time was gained, and when Jardine found that he was not disposed to let himself be slaughtered, he might accept a reasonable arrangement. But he must manage so that Caffie would not prevent this arrangement.

Unfortunately, he felt himself hardly capable of such manoeuvring, having been always straightforward, his eyes fixed on the end he wished to attain, and thinking only of the work through which he would attain it. And now he must act the part of a diplomat, submitting to craftiness and rogueries that were not at all in accord with his open nature. He had begun by not telling Caffie, instantly, what he thought of his propositions; but it is more difficult to act than to control one's self, to speak than to be silent.

What would he say, what would he do, when the time for action came?

He reached his house without having decided anything, and as he passed before the concierge's lodge absorbed in thought, he heard some one call him.

"Doctor, come in a moment, I beg of you."

He thought some one wished to consult him, some countryman who had waited for his return; and, although he did not feel like listening patiently to idle complainings, he turned back and entered the lodge.

"Some one brought this," the concierge said, handing him a paper that was stamped and covered with a running handwriting. "This" was the beginning of the fire of which Caffie had spoken. Without reading it, Saniel put it in his pocket and turned to go; but the concierge detained him.

"I would like to say two words to 'monchieur le docteur' about this paper."

"Have you read it?"

"No, but I talked with the officer who gave it to me, and he told me what it meant. It is unfortunate, doctor."

To be pitied by his concierge! This was too much.

"It is not as he told you," he replied, haughtily.

"So much the better. I am glad for you and for me. You can pay my little bill."

"Give it to me."

"I have given it to you twice already, but I have a copy. Here it is."

To be sued by a creditor paralyzed Saniel; he was stunned, crushed, humiliated, and could only answer stupidly. Taking the bill that the concierge handed him, he put it in his pocket and stammered a few words.

"You see, doctor, I must say what has been in my heart a long time. You are my countryman, and I esteem you too much not to speak. In taking your apartment and engaging your upholsterer, you did too much. You ruin yourself. Give up your apartment, and take the one opposite that costs less than half, and you will get on. You will not be obliged to leave this quarter. What will become of our neighbors if you leave us? You are a good doctor; everybody knows it and says so. And now, as for my bill, it is understood that I shall be paid first, shall I not?"

"As soon as I have the money I will pay you."

"It is a promise?"

"I promise you."

"Thank you very much."

"If it could be to-morrow, it would suit me. I am not rich, you know, but

I have always paid the gas-bill for your experiments."

With the paper in his pocket, Saniel returned to Caffie, who was just going out, and to whom he gave it.

"I will see about it this, evening," said the man of business. "Just now I am going to dinner. Do not worry. To-morrow I will do what is necessary. Good-evening. I am dying of hunger."

But three days before, Saniel emptied his purse to soothe his upholsterer by an instalment as large as he was able to make it, keeping only five francs for himself, and with the few sous left he could not go to a restaurant, not even the lowest and cheapest. He could only buy some bread for his supper, and eat it while working, as he had often done before.

But when he returned to his rooms he was not in a state of mind to write an article that must be delivered that evening. Among other things that he had undertaken was one, and not the least fastidious, which consisted in giving, by correspondence, advice to the subscribers of a fashion magazine, or, more exactly speaking, to recommend, in the form of medical advice, all the cosmetics, depilatories, elixirs, dyes, essences, oils, creams, soaps, pomades, toothpowders, rouges, and also all the chemists' specialties, to which their inventors wished to give an authority that the public, which believes itself acute, refused to the simple advertisement on the last page. With his ambition and the career before him, he would never have consented to carry on this correspondence under his own name. He did it for a neighboring doctor, a simple man, who was not so cautious, and who signed his name to these letters, glad to get clients from any quarter. For his trouble, Saniel took this doctor's place during Sunday in summer, and from time to time received a box of perfumery or quack medicines, which he sold at a low price when occasion offered.

Every week he received the list of cosmetics and specialties that he must make use of in his correspondence, no matter how he recommended them, whether in answer to letters that were really addressed to him, or by inventing questions that gave him the opportunity to introduce them.

He began to consult this list and the pile of letters from subscribers that the magazine had sent him, when the doorbell rang. Perhaps it was a patient, the good patient whom he had expected for four years. He left his desk to open the door.

It was his coal man, who came with his bill.

"I will stop some day when I am near you," Saniel said. "I am in a hurry this evening."

"And I am in a hurry, too; I must pay a large bill tomorrow, and I count upon having some money from you."

"I have no money here."

After a long talk he got rid of the man and returned to his desk. He had answered but a few of the many letters when his bell rang again. This time he would not open the door; it was a creditor, without doubt. And he continued his correspondence.

But for four years he had waited for chance to draw him a good ticket in the lottery of life--a rich patient afflicted with a cyst or a tumor that he would take to a fashionable surgeon, who would divide with him the ten or fifteen thousand francs that he would receive for the operation. In that case he would be saved.

He ran to the door. The patient with the cyst presented himself in the form of a small bearded man with a red face, wearing over his vest the wine-merchant's apron of coarse black cloth. In fact, it was the wine merchant from the corner, who, having heard of the officer's visit, came to ask for the payment of his bill for furnishing wine for three months.

A scene similar to that which he had had with the coal merchant, but more violent, took place, and it was only by threatening to put him out of the door that Saniel got rid of the man, who went away declaring that he would come the next morning with an officer.

Saniel returned to his work.

His pen flew over the paper, when a noise made him raise his head. Either he had not closed the door tightly, or his servant was entering with his key. What did he want? He did not employ him all day, but only during his office hours, to put his rooms in order and to open the door for his clients.

As Saniel rose to go and see who it was, there was a knock at the door. It was his servant, with a blank and embarrassed air.

"What is the matter, Joseph?"

"I thought I should find you, sir, so I came."

"Why?"

Joseph hesitated; then, taking courage, he said volubly, while lowering his eyes:

"I came to ask, sir, if you will pay me my month, which expired on the fifteenth, because there is need of money at my house; if there was not need of money I would not have come. If you wish, sir, I will release you--"

"How?"

"I will take the coat that you made me order a month ago; I am quite sure it is not worth what is due me, but it is always so."

"Take the coat."

Joseph took the coat from the wardrobe in the hall, and rolled it in a newspaper.

"Of course you will not expect me in the morning," he said, as he put his key on the table. "I must look out for another place."

"Very well, I shall not expect you."

"Good-evening, sir."

And Joseph hurried away as quickly as possible.

Left alone, Saniel did not return to his work immediately, but throwing himself in an armchair he cast a melancholy glance around his office and through the open door into the parlor. In the faint light of the candle he saw the large armchairs methodically placed each side of the chimney, the curtains at the windows lost in shadow, and all the furniture which for four years had cost him so many efforts. He had long been the prisoner of this Louis XIV camlet, and he was now going to be executed. A beautiful affair, truly, brilliant and able! All this had been used only by the poor Auvergnats, without Saniel enjoying it at all, for he had neither the bourgeois taste for ornaments nor the desire for elegance. A movement of anger and revolt against himself made him strike his desk with his fist. What a fool he had been!

The bell rang again. This time, not expecting a rich patient, he would not open it. After a moment a slight tap was heard on the panel. He rose quickly and ran to open the door.

A woman threw herself into his arms.

"O my dearest! I am so glad to find you at home!"

CHAPTER VI

A SWEET CONSOLER

She passed her arm about him and pressed him to her, and with arms entwined they entered the study.

"How glad I am!" she said. "What a good idea I had!"

With a quick movement she took off her long gray cloak that enveloped her from head to foot.

"And are you glad?" she asked, as she stood looking at him.

"Can you ask that?"

"Only to hear you say that you are."

"Are you not my only joy, the sweet lamp that gives me light in the cavern where I work day and night?"

"Dear Victor!"

She was a tall, slender young woman with chestnut hair, whose thick curls clustering about her forehead almost touched her eyebrows. Her beautiful eyes were dark, her nose short, while her superb teeth and rich, ruby-colored lips gave her the effect of a pretty doll; and she had gayety, playful vivacity, gracious effrontery, and a passionate caressing glance. Dressed extravagantly, like the Parisian woman who has not a sou, but who adorns everything she wears, she had an ease, a freedom, a natural elegance that was charming. With this she had the voice of a child, a joyous laugh, and an expression of sensibility on her fresh face.

"I have come to dine with you," she said, gayly, "and I am so hungry."

He made a gesture that was not lost upon her.

"Do I disturb you?" she asked, uneasily.

"Not at all."

"Must you go out?"

"No."

"Then why did you make a gesture that showed indifference, or, at least, embarrassment?"

"You are mistaken, my little Phillis."

"With any one else I might be mistaken, but with you it is impossible. You know that between us words are not necessary; that I read in your eyes what you would say, in your face what you think and feel. Is it not always so when one loves--as I love you?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her long and tenderly. Then going to a chair on which he had thrown his coat, he drew from the pocket the bread that he had bought.

"This is my dinner," he said, showing the bread.

"Oh! I must scold you. Work is making you lose your head. Can you not take time to eat?"

He smiled sadly.

"It is not time that I want."

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out three big sous.

"I cannot dine at a restaurant with six sous."

She threw herself in his arms.

"O dearest, forgive me!" she cried. "Poor, dear martyr! Dear, great man! It is I who accuse you, when I ought to embrace your knees. And you do not scold me; a sad smile is your only reply. And it is really so bad as that! Nothing to eat!"

"Bread is very good eating. If I might be assured that I shall always have some!"

"Well, to-day you shall have something more and better. This morning, seeing the storm, an idea came to me associated with you. It is quite natural, since you are always in my heart and in my thoughts. I told mamma that if the storm continued I would dine at the pension. You can imagine with what joy I listened to the wind all day, and watched the rain and leaves falling, and the dead branches waving in the whirlwind. Thank God, the weather was bad enough for mamma to believe me safe at the pension; and here I am. But we must not fast. I shall go and buy something to eat, and we will play at making dinner by the fire, which will be far more amusing than going to a restaurant."

She put on her cloak quickly.

"Set the table while I make my purchases."

"I have my article to finish that will be sent for at eight o'clock. Just think, I have three tonics to recommend, four preparations of iron, a dye, two capillary lotions, an opiate, and I don't know how many soaps and powders. What a business!"

"Very well, then, do not trouble yourself about the table; we will set it together when you have finished, and that will be much more amusing."

"You take everything in good part."

"Is it better to look on the dark side? I shall soon return."

She went to the door.

"Do not be extravagant," he said.

"There is no danger," she replied, striking her pocket.

Then, returning to him, she embraced him passionately.

"Work!"

And she ran out.

They had loved each other for two years. At the time they met, Saniel was giving a course of lectures on anatomy at a young ladies' school just outside of Paris, and every time he went out there he saw a young woman whom he could not help noticing. She came and went on the same trains that he did, and gave lessons in a rival school. As she frequently carried under her arm a large cartoon, and sometimes a plaster cast, he concluded that she gave lessons in drawing. At first he paid no attention to her. What was she to him? He had more important things in his head than women. But little by little, and because she was reserved and discreet, he was struck by the vivacity and gayety of her expression. He really enjoyed looking at this pretty and pleasing young woman. However, his looks said nothing; if their eyes smiled when they met, that was all; they did not make each other's acquaintance. When they left the train they did not notice each other; if he took the left side of the street, she took the other, and vice versa. This state of things lasted several months without a word having been exchanged between them; in due time they learned each other's names and professions. She was a professor of drawing, as he supposed, the daughter of an artist who had been dead several years, and was called Mademoiselle Phillis Cormier. He was a physician for whom a brilliant future was prophesied, a man of power, who would some day be famous; and, very naturally, their attitude remained the same. There was no particular reason why it should change. But accident made a reason. One summer day, at the hour when they ordinarily took the train back to Paris, the sky suddenly became overcast, and it was evident that a violent storm was approaching. Saniel saw Phillis hurrying to the station without an umbrella, and, as some friend had lent him one, he decided to speak to her for the first time.

"It seems as if the storm would overtake us before we reach the station. As you have no umbrella, will you permit me to walk beside you, and to shelter you with mine?"

She replied with a smile, and they walked side by side until the rain began to fall, when she drew nearer to him, and they entered the station talking gayly.

"Your umbrella is better than Virginia's skirt," she said.

"And what is Virginia's skirt?"

"Have you not read Paul and Virginia?"

"No."

She looked at him with a mocking smile, wondering what superior men read.

Not only had he not read Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's romance, nor any others, but he had never been in love. He knew nothing of the affairs of the heart nor of the imagination. Leisure must be had for light reading, and even more for love, for they require a liberty of mind and an independence of life that he had not. Where could he find time to read novels? When and how could he pay attention to a woman? Those that he

had known since his arrival in Paris had not had the slightest influence over him, and he retained only faint memories of them. On the contrary, thinking of this walk in the rain, he remembered this young girl with a vividness entirely new to him. She made a strong impression on him, and it remained. He saw her again, with her smile that showed her brilliant teeth, he heard the music of her voice, and the bare plain that he had walked so many times now seemed the most beautiful country in the world to him. Evidently there was a change in him; something was awakened in his soul; for the first time he discovered that the hollow and muscular conoid organ called the heart had a use besides for the circulation of blood.

What a surprise and what a disappointment! Was he going to be simpleton enough to love this young girl and entangle his life, already so hard and heavily weighted, with a woman? A fine thing, truly, and nature had built him to play the lover! It is true that only those who wish it fall in love, and he knew the power of will by experience.

But he soon lost confidence in himself. Away from Phillis he could do as he wished, but with her it was as she wished. With one look she mastered him. He met her, furious at the influence she exercised over him, and against which he had struggled since their last meeting; he left her, ravished at feeling how profoundly he loved her.

To a man whose life had been ruled by reason and logic until this moment, these contradictions were exasperating; and he only excused himself for submitting to them by saying that they could in no way modify the line of conduct that he had traced out for himself, nor make him deviate from the road that he followed.

Rich, or even with a small fortune, he might--when he was with her and in her power--let himself be carried away; but when he was dying of hunger he was not going to commit the folly of taking a wife. What would he have to give her? Misery, nothing but misery; and shame, in default of any other reason, would forever prevent him from offering himself to her.

She was the daughter of an artist who, after years of struggle, died at the moment when fortune was beginning to smile upon him. Ten years more of work, and he would have left his family, if not rich, at least in comfortable circumstances. In reality, he left nothing but ruin. The hotel he built was sold, and, after the debts were paid, nothing remained but some furniture. His widow, son, and daughter must work. The widow, having no trade, took in sewing; the son left college to become the clerk of a money-lender named Caffie; the daughter, who, happily for her, had learned to draw and paint under her father's direction, obtained pupils, and designed menaces for the stationers, and painted silk fans and boxes. They lived with great economy, submitting to many privations. The brother, weary of his monotonous existence and of the exactions of his master, left them to try his fortunes in America.

If Saniel ever married, which he doubted, certainly he would not marry a woman situated as Phillis was.

This reflection was reassuring, and he was more devoted to her. Why should he not enjoy the delicious pleasure of seeing her and listening to her? His life was neither gay nor happy; he felt perfectly sure of himself, and, as he knew her now, he was also sure of her--a brave and honest girl. Otherwise, how had she divined that he loved her?

They continued to see each other with a pleasure that seemed equal on both sides, meeting in the station, arranging to take the same trains, and talking freely and gayly.

Things went on this way until the approach of vacation, when they decided to take a walk after their last lesson, instead of returning immediately to Paris.

When the day came the sun was very hot; they had walked some distance, when Phillis expressed a wish to rest for a few minutes. They seated themselves in a shady copse, and soon found themselves in each other's arms.

Since then Saniel had never spoken of marriage, and neither had Phillis.

They loved each other.

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE DINNER FOR TWO

Saniel was still at work when Phillis returned.

"You have not yet finished, dear?"

"Give me time to cure, by correspondence, a malady that has not yielded to the care of ten physicians, and I am yours."

In three lines he finished the letter, and left his desk.

"I am ready. What shall I do?"

"Help me to take things out of my pockets."

"Don't press too hard," she said as he took each parcel.

At last the pockets were empty.

"Where shall we dine?" she asked.

"Here, as the dining-room is transformed into a laboratory."

"Then let us begin by making a good fire. I wet my feet coming from the station."

"I do not know whether there is any wood."

"Let us see."

She took the candle and they passed into the kitchen, which, like the dining-room, was a laboratory, a stable where Saniel kept in cages pigs from India and rabbits for his experiments, and where Joseph heaped pell-mell the things that were in his way, without paying any attention to the stove in which there never had been a fire. But their search was vain; there was everything in this kitchen except fire-wood.

"Do you value these boxes?" she asked, caressing a little pig that she had taken in her arms.

"Not at all; they enclosed the perfumes and tonics, but they are useless now."

They returned to the office, Saniel carrying the boxes.

"We will set the table here," she said, gayly, for Saniel told her that the dining-room was uninviting, as it was a small bacteriological laboratory.

The table was set by Phillis, who went and came, walking about with a gracefulness that Saniel admired.

"You are doing nothing," she said.

"I am watching you and thinking."

"And the result of these thoughts?"

"It is that you have a fund of good-humor and gayety, an exuberance of life, that would enliven a man condemned to death."

"And what would have become of us, I should like to know, if I had been melancholy and discouraged when we lost my poor papa? He was joy itself, singing all day long, laughing and joking. He brought me up, and I am like him. Mamma, as you know, is melancholy and nervous, looking on the dark side, and Florentin is like her. I obtained a place for Florentin, I found work for mamma and for myself. We all took courage, and gradually we became calm."

She looked at him with a smile that said:

"Will you let me do for you what I have done for others?"

But she did not speak these words. On the contrary, she immediately endeavored to destroy the impression which she believed her words had made upon him.

"Go and bring some water," she said, "and I will light the fire."

When he returned, carrying a carafe, the fire blazed brightly, lighting the whole room. Phillis was seated at the desk, writing.

"What are you doing?" he asked in surprise.

"I am writing our menu, for you know we are not going to sit down at the table like the bourgeois. How do you like it?"

She read it to him.

"Sardines de Nantes."

"Cuisse de dinde rotie."

"Terrine de pate de foie gras aux truffes du Perigord."

"But this is a feast."

"Did you think that I would offer you a fricandeau au jus?"

She continued:

"Fromage de Brie."

"Choux a la creme vanillge."

"Pomme de Normandie."

"Wine."

"Ah! Voila! What wine? I do not wish to deceive you. Let us put, 'Wine from the wine-seller at the corner.' And now we will sit down."

As he was about to seat himself, she said:

"You do not give me your arm to conduct me to the table. If we do not do things seriously and methodically we shall not believe in them, and perhaps the Perigord truffles will change into little black pieces of anything else."

When they were seated opposite to each other, she continued, jesting:

"My dear doctor, did you go to the representation of Don Juan, on Monday?"

And Saniel, who, in spite of all, had kept a sober face, now laughed loudly.

"Charming!" she cried, clapping her hands. "No more preoccupation; no more cares. Look into my eyes, dear Victor, and think only of the present hour, of the joy of being together, of our love."

She reached her hand over the table, and he pressed it in his.

"Very well." The dinner continued gayly, Saniel replying to Phillis's smiles, who would not permit the conversation to languish. She helped him to each dish, poured out his wine, leaving her chair occasionally to put a piece of wood on the fire, and such shoutings and laughter had never been heard before in that office.

However, she noticed that, little by little, Saniel's face, that relaxed one moment, was the next clouded by the preoccupation and bitterness that she had tried hard to chase away. She would make a new effort.

"Does not this charming little dinner give you the wish to repeat it?"

"How? Where?"

"As I am able to come this evening without making mamma uneasy, I shall find some excuse to come again next week."

He shook his head.

"Have you engagements for the whole of next week?" she asked with uneasiness.

"Where shall I be next week, to-morrow, in a few days?"

"You alarm me. Explain, I beg of you. O Victor, have pity! Do not leave me in suspense."

"You are right; I ought to tell you everything, and not let your tender heart torment itself, trying to explain my preoccupation."

"If you have cares, do you not esteem me enough to let me share them with you? You know that I love you; you only, to-day, to-morrow, forever!"

Saniel had not left her ignorant of the difficulties of his position, but he had not entered into details, preferring to speak of his hopes rather than of his present misery.

The story that he had already told to Glady and Caffie he now told to Phillis, adding what had passed with the concierge, the wine-seller, the coal man, and Joseph.

She listened, stupefied.

"He took your coat?" she murmured.

"That was what he came for."

"And to-morrow?"

"Ah! to-morrow--to-morrow!"

"Working so hard as you have, how did you come to such a pass?"

"Like you, I believed in the virtue of work, and look at me! Because I felt within me a will that nothing could weaken, a strength that nothing could fatigue, a courage that nothing could, dishearten, I imagined that I was armed for battle in such a way that I should never be conquered, and I am conquered, as much by the fault of circumstances as by my own--"

"And in what are you to blame, poor dear?"

"For my ignorance of life, stupidity, presumption, and blindness. If I had been less simple, should I have been taken in by Jardine's propositions? Should I have accepted this furniture, this apartment? He told me that the papers he made me sign were mere formalities, that in reality I might pay when I could, and that he would be content with a fair interest. That seemed reasonable, and, without inquiring further, I accepted, happy and delighted to have a home, feeling sure of having strength to bear this burden. To have confidence in one's self is strength, but it is also weakness. Because you love me you do not know me; you do not see me as I am. In reality, I am not sociable, and I lack, absolutely, suppleness, delicacy, politeness, as much in my character as in my manners. Being so, how can I obtain a large practice, or succeed, unless it is by some stroke of luck? I have counted on the luck, but its hour has not yet sounded. Because I lack suppleness I have not been able to win the sympathy or interest of my masters. They see only my reserve; and because I stay away from them, as much through timidity as pride, they do not come to me--which is quite natural, I admit. And because I have not yielded my ideas to the authority of others, they have taken a dislike to me, which is still more natural. Because I lack politeness, and am still an Auvergnat, heavy and awkward as nature made me, men of the world disdain me, judging me by my exterior, which they see and dislike. More wary, more sly, more experienced, I should be, at least, sustained by friendship, but I have given no thought to it. What good is it? I had no need of it, my force was sufficient. I find it more easy to make myself feared than loved. Thus formed, there are only two things for me to do: remain in my poor room in the Hotel du Senat, living by giving lessons and by work from the booksellers, until the examination and admission to the central bureau; or to establish myself in an out-of-the-way quarter at Belleville, Montrouge, or elsewhere, and there practise among people who will demand neither politeness nor fine manners. As these two ways are reasonable, I have made up my mind to neither. Belleville, because I should work only with my legs, like one of my comrades whom I saw work at Villette: 'Your tongue, good. Your arm, good.' And while he is supposed to be feeling the pulse of the patient with one hand, with the other he is writing his prescription: 'Vomitive, purgative, forty sous;' and he hurries away, his diagnosis having taken less than five minutes; he had no time to waste. I object to the Hotel du Senat because I have had enough of it, and it was there that Jardine tempted me with his proposals. See what he has brought me to!"

"And now?"

CHAPTER VIII

EXPLANATIONS

At this moment, without warning, the candle on the table went out.

Phillis rose. "Where are the candles?" she asked.

"There are no more; this was the last."

"Then we must brighten up the fire."

She threw a small log on the hearth, and then, instead of resuming her seat, she took a cushion from the sofa, and placing it before the chimney, threw herself upon it, and leaned her elbow on Saniel's knee.

"And now?" she repeated, her eyes raised to his.

"Now I suppose the only thing for me to do is to return to Auvergne and become a country doctor."

"My God! is it possible?" she murmured in a tone that surprised Saniel. If there was sadness in this cry, there was also a sentiment that he did not understand.

"On leaving the school I could continue to live at the Hotel du Senat, and, while giving lessons, prepare my 'conours'; now, after having reached a certain position, can I return to this life of poverty and study? My creditors, who have fallen on me here, will harass me, and my competitors will mock my misery--which is caused by my vices. They will think that I dishonor the Faculty, and I shall be rebuffed. Neither doctor of the hospitals nor fellow, I shall be reduced to nothing but a doctor of the quarter. Of what use is it? The effort has been made here; you see how it has succeeded."

"Then you mean to go?"

"Not without sorrow and despair, since it will be our separation, the renouncement of all the hopes on which I have lived for ten years, the abandonment of my work, death itself. You see now why, in spite of your gayety, I have not been able to hide my preoccupation from you. The more charming you were, the more I felt how dear you are, and the greater my despair at the thought of separation."

"Why should we separate?"

"What do you mean?"

She turned toward him.

"To go with you. You must acknowledge that until this moment I have never spoken to you of marriage, and never have I let the thought appear that you might one day make me your wife. In your position, in the struggle you have been through, a wife would have been a burden that would have paralyzed you; above all, such a poor, miserable creature as myself, with no dot but her misery and that of her family. But the conditions are no longer the same. You are as miserable as I am, and more desperate. In your own country, where you have only distant relatives who are nothing to you, as they have not your education or ideas, desires or habits, what will become of you all alone with your 158 disappointment and regrets? If you accept me, I will go with you; together, and loving each other, we cannot be unhappy anywhere. When you come home fatigued you will find me with a smile; when you stay at home you will tell me your thoughts, and explain your work, and I will try to understand. I have no fear of poverty, you know, and neither do I fear solitude. Wherever we are together I shall be happy. All that I ask of you is to take my mother with us, because you know I cannot leave her alone. In attending her, you have learned to know her well enough to know that she is not disagreeable or difficult to please. As for Florentin, he will remain in Paris and work. His trip to America has made him wise, and his ambition will now be easily satisfied; to earn a small salary is all that he asks. Without doubt we shall be a burden, but not so heavy as one might think at first. A woman, when she chooses, brings order and economy into a house, and I promise you that I will be that woman. And then I will work. I am sure my stationer will give me as many menus when I am in Auvergne as he does now that I am in Paris. I could, also, without doubt, procure other work. It would be a hundred francs a month, perhaps a hundred and fifty, perhaps even two hundred. While waiting for your patients to come, we could live on this money. In Auvergne living must be cheap."

She had taken his hands in hers, and she watched anxiously his face as the firelight shone on it, to see the effect of her words. It was the life of both of them that was to be decided, and the fulness of her heart made her voice tremble. What would he reply? She saw that his face was agitated, without being able to read more.

As she remained silent, he took her head in his hands, and looked in her face for several moments.

"How you love me!" he said.

"Let me prove it in some way besides in words."

"It would be cowardly to let you share my misery."

"It would be loving me enough to feel sure that I would be happy."

"And I?"

"Is not the love in your heart greater than pride? Do you not feel that since I have loved you my love has filled all my life, and that there is nothing in the world, in the present or in the future, but it and you?"

Because I see you for several hours from time to time in Paris, I am happy; whatever difficulties await us, I should be much happier in Auvergne, because we should be together always."

He remained silent for some time.

"Could you love me there?" he murmured.

Evidently it was more to himself than to her that he addressed this question, which was the sum of his reflections.

"O dear Victor!" she cried. "Why do you doubt me? Have I deserved it? The past, the present, do they not assure the future?"

He shook his head.

"The man you have loved, whom you love, has never shown himself to you as he really is. In spite of the trials and sorrows of his life he has been able to answer your smile with a smile, because, cruel as his life was, he was sustained by hope and confidence; in Auvergne there will be no more hope or confidence, but the madness of a broken life, and the dejection of impotence. What sort of man should I be? Could you love such a man?"

"A thousand times more, for he would be unhappy, and I should have to comfort him."

"Would you have the strength to do it? After a time you would become weary, for the burden would be too heavy, however great your devotion or profound your tenderness, to see my real position and my hopes, and, descending into the future, to see my ruin. You know I am ambitious without having ever compassed the scope of this ambition, and of the hopes, dreams if you like, on which it rests. Understand that these dreams are on the eve of being realized; two months more, and in December or January I pass the 'concours' for the central bureau, which will make me a physician of the hospitals, and at the same time the one for the admission, which opens the Faculty of Medicine to me. Without pride, I believe myself in a position to succeed--what sportsmen call 'in condition.' And just when I have only a few days to wait, behold me ruined forever."

"Why forever?"

"A man leaves his village for Paris to make a name for himself, and he returns only when bad luck or inability sends him back. And then it is only every four years that there is a 'concours' for admission. In four years what will be my moral and intellectual condition? How should I support this exile of four years? Imagine the effect that four years of isolation in the mountains will produce. But this is not all. Besides this ostensible end that I have pursued since I left my village, I have my special work that I can carry out only in Paris. Without having overwhelmed you with the details of medicine, you know that it is about to undergo a revolution that will transform it. Until now it has been

taught officially, in pathology, that the human organism carries within itself the germ of a great many infectious diseases which develop spontaneously in certain conditions; for instance, that tuberculosis is the result of fatigue, privations, and physiological miseries. Well, recently it has been admitted, that is to say, the revolutionists admit, a parasitical origin for these diseases, and in France and Germany there is an army looking for these parasites. I am a soldier in this army, and to help me in these researches I established a laboratory in the dining-room. It is to the parasites of tuberculosis and cancers that I devote myself, and for seven years, that is, since I was house-surgeon, my comrades have called me the cancer topic. I have discovered the parasite of the tuberculosis, but I have not yet been able to free it from all its impurities by the process of culture. I am still at it. That is to say, I am very near it, and to-morrow, perhaps, or in a few days, I may make a discovery that will be a revolution, and cover its discoverer with glory. The same with the cancer. I have found its microbe. But all is not done. See what I must give up in leaving Paris."

"Why give all this up? Could you not continue your researches in Auvergne?"

"It is impossible, for many reasons that are too long to explain, but one will suffice. The culture of these parasites can be done only in certain temperatures rigorously maintained at the necessary degree, and these temperatures can be obtained only by stoves, like the one in my laboratory, fed by gas, the entrance of which is automatically regulated by the temperature of the water. How could I use this stove in a country where there is no gas? No, no! If I leave Paris, everything is at an end my position, as well as my work. I shall become a country doctor, and nothing but a country doctor. Let the sheriff turn me out to-morrow, and all the four years' accumulations in my laboratory, all my works en train that demand only a few days or hours to complete, may go to the second-hand dealer, or be thrown into the street. Of all my efforts, weary nights, privations, and hopes, there remains only one souvenir--for me. And yet, if it did not remain, perhaps I should be less exasperated, and should accept with a heart less sore the life to which I shall never resign myself. You know very well that I am a rebel, and do not submit tamely."

She rose, and taking his hand, pressed it closely in her own.

"You must stay in Paris," she said. "Pardon me for having insisted that you could live in the country. I thought more of myself than of you, of our love and our marriage. It was an egotistic thought, a bad thought. A way must be found, no matter what it costs, to enable you to continue your work."

"But how to find it? Do you think I have not tried everything?"

He related his visits to Jardine, his solicitations, prayers, and also his request of a loan from Glady, and his visit to Caffie.

"Caffie!" she cried. "What made you think of going to Caffie?"

"I went partly because you had often spoken of him."

"But I spoke of him to you as the most wicked of men, capable of anything and everything that is bad."

"And partly, also, because I knew from one of my patients that he lends to those of whom he can make use."

"What did he say to you?"

"That it was probable he would not be able to find any one who would lend what I wished, but he would try to find some one, and would give me an answer tomorrow evening. He also promised to protect me from Jardine."

"You have put yourself in his hands?"

"Well, what do you expect? In my position, I am not at liberty to go to whom I wish and to those who inspire me with confidence in their honor. If I should go to a notary or a banker they would not listen to me, for I should be obliged to tell them, the first thing, that I have no security to offer. That is how the unfortunate fall into the hands of rascals; at least, these listen to them, and lend them something, small though it may be."

"What did he give you?"

"Advice."

"And you took it?"

"There is time gained. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall be turned into the street. Caffie will obtain a respite."

"And what price will he ask for this service?"

"It is only those who own something who worry about the price."

"You have your name, dignity, and honor, and once you are in Caffie's hands, who knows what he may exact from you, what he may make you do, without your being able to resist him?"

"Then you wish me to leave Paris?"

"Certainly not; but I wish you to be on your guard against Caffie, whom you do not know, but I do, through what Florentin told us when he was with him. However secret a man may be, he cannot hide himself from his clerk. He is not only guilty of rascalities, but also of real crimes. I assure you that he deserves ten deaths. To gain a hundred francs he will do anything; he makes money only for the pleasure of making it, for he has neither child nor relative."

"Well, I promise to be on my guard as you advise. But, wicked as Caffie

may be, I believe that I shall accept the concours that he offered me. Who knows what may happen in the short time that he gains for me? Because I need not tell you that I know beforehand what his reply will be to my request for a loan--he could find no one."

"I shall come, all the same, to-morrow evening to learn his answer."

CHAPTER IX

CAFFIE'S ANSWER

Although Sanial did not build any false hopes on Caffie's reply, he went to see him the next afternoon at the same hour.

As before, he waited some time after ringing the bell. At last he heard a slow step within.

"Who is there?" Caffie asked.

As soon as Sanial answered, the door was opened.

"As I do not like to be disturbed in the evening by troublesome people, I do not always open the door," Caffie said. "But I have a signal for my clients so that I may know them. After ringing, knock three times on the door."

During this explanation they entered Caffie's office.

"Have you done anything about my affair?" Sanial asked, after a moment, as Caffie seemed disinclined to open the conversation.

"Yes, my dear sir. I have been running about all the morning for you. I never neglect my clients; their affairs are mine."

He paused.

"Well?" Sanial said.

Caffie put on an expression of despair.

"What did I tell you, my dear sir? Do you remember? Do me the honor to believe that a man of my experience does not speak lightly. What I foresaw has come to pass. Everywhere I received the same reply. The risk is too great; no one would take it."

"Not even for a large interest?"

"Not even for a large interest; there is so much competition in your profession. As for me, I believe in your future, and I have proved it by my proposition; but, unfortunately, I am only an intermediary, and not

the lender of money."

Caffie emphasized the words, "my proposition," and underlined them with a glance; but Saniel did not appear to understand.

"And the upholsterer's summons?" he asked.

"You may be easy on that point. I have attended to it. Your landlord, to whom he owes rent, will interfere, and your creditor must indemnify him before going farther. Will he submit? We shall see. If he does, we shall defend ourselves on some other ground. I do not say victoriously, but in a way to gain time."

"How much time?"

"That, my dear sir, I do not know; the whole thing depends upon our adversary. But what do you mean by 'how much time?'--eternity?"

"I mean until April."

"That is eternity. Do you believe that you will be able to free yourself in April? If you have expectations founded on something substantial, you should tell me what they are, my dear sir."

This question was put with such an air of benevolence, that Saniel was taken in by it.

"I have no guarantee," he said. "But, on the other hand, it is of the utmost importance to me that I should have this length of time. As I have explained to you, I am about to pass two examinations; they will last three months, and in March, or, at the latest, in April, I shall be a physician of the hospitals, and fellow of the Faculty. In that case I should then offer a surface to the lenders, that would permit you, without doubt, to find the sum necessary to pay Jardine, whatever expenses there may be, and your fee."

As he spoke, Saniel saw that he was wrong in thus committing himself, but he continued to the end.

"I should be unworthy of your confidence, my dear sir," Caffie replied, "if I encouraged you with the idea that we could gain so much time. Whatever it costs me--and it costs me much, I assure you--I must tell you that it is impossible, radically impossible; a few days, yes, or a few weeks, but that is all."

"Well, obtain a few weeks," Saniel said, rising, "that will be something."

"And afterward?"

"We shall see."

"My dear sir, do not go. You would not believe how much I am touched by

your position; I think only of you. When I learned that I could not find the sum you desire, I paid a friendly visit to my young client of whom I spoke to you--"

"The one who received a superior education in a fashionable convent?"

"Exactly; and I asked her what she would think of a young doctor, full of talent, future professor of the Faculty, actually considered already a savant of the first order, handsome--because you are handsome, my dear sir, and it is no flattery to say this--in good health, a peasant by birth, who presented himself as a husband. She appeared flattered, I tell you frankly. But immediately afterward she said, 'And the child?' To which I replied that you were too good, too noble, too generous, not to have the indulgence of superior men, who accept an involuntary fault with serenity. Did I go too far?"

He did not wait for an answer.

"No?" he went on. "Exactly. The child was present, for the mother watches over it with a solicitude that promises much for the future, and I examined it leisurely. It is very delicate, my dear sir, and like its father. The poor baby! I doubt if you, with all your skill, can make it live. If it should die, as it is to be feared it will, it would not injure your reputation. You can give it care, but not life."

"Speaking of health," interrupted Saniel, who did not wish to reply, "did you do what I advised about yourself?"

"Not yet. The chemists of this quarter are only licensed cutthroats; but I am going this evening to see one of my clients who is a chemist, and he will deal honestly with me."

"I will see you again, then."

"When you wish, my dear sir; when you have reflected. You have the password."

Before leaving home Saniel gave his key to the concierge, so that on her arrival Phillis might go immediately to his rooms. On his return the concierge told him that "madame" was up-stairs, and when he rang the bell, Phillis opened the door.

"Well?" she asked in a trembling voice, before he had time to enter.

"It is as I told you yesterday; he has found no one."

She clasped him in a long, passionate embrace.

"And the upholsterer?"

"Caffie has promised to gain some time for me."

While speaking, they entered the office. A fire burned on the hearth,

and an inviting dinner was on the table. Saniel looked at it in surprise.

"I have set the table, you see; I am going to dine with you."

And throwing herself in his arms:

"Knowing Caffie better than you do, I knew what his answer would be, and I did not wish you to be alone on your return. I made an excuse for not dining with mamma."

"But this chicken?"

"We must have a piece de resistance."

"This fire, and these candles?"

"There, that is the end of my economies. I should have been so happy if they had been less miserable and more useful."

As on the previous evening, they sat before the fire, and she began to talk of various things in order to distract him. But what their lips did not say, their eyes, on meeting, expressed with more intensity than words could do.

It was Saniel who suddenly betrayed his preoccupation.

"Your brother studied Caffie well," he said, as if speaking to himself.

"He did, indeed!"

"He is certainly the most thorough rascal that I have ever met."

"He proposed something infamous, I am sure."

"He proposed that I should marry."

"I suspected that."

"This is the reason why he refuses to lend me the money. I was foolish enough to tell him frankly just how I am situated, and how important it is for me to be free until April. He hopes that I shall be so pushed that I will accept one of the women whom he has proposed to me. With the knife at my throat, I should have to yield."

"And these women?" she asked, not daring to look at him.

"Do not be alarmed, you have nothing to fear. One is the drunken widow of a butcher, and the other is a young girl who has a baby."

"He dares to propose such women to a man like you!"

And Saniel repeated all that Caffie had said to him about these two

women.

"What a monster he is!" Phillis said.

"While he was telling me these things I thought of what you said--that if some one killed him, it would be no more than he deserved."

"That is perfectly true."

"Nothing would have been easier than for me to have made away with him. He had the toothache, and when he showed me his teeth I could easily have strangled him. We were alone, and a miserable diabetic, such as he is, who has not more than six months to live, I am sure, could not have resisted a grasp like this. I could take his keys from his pocket, open his safe, and take the thirty, forty, sixty thousand francs that I saw heaped up there. The devil take me if it were ever discovered. A doctor does not strangle his patients, he poisons them. He kills them scientifically, not brutally."

"People who have no conscience can do such things; but for us they are impossible."

"I assure you it is not conscience that would have restrained me."

"The fear of remorse, if I may use an ugly word."

"But intelligent persons have no remorse, my dear child, because they reason before the deed, and not after. Before acting they weigh the pros and cons, and know what the consequences of their actions will be to others as well as to themselves. If this previous examination proves to them that for some reason or other they may act, they will always be calm, assured that they will feel no remorse, which is only the reproach of conscience."

"Without doubt what you say is to the point, but it is impossible for me to accept it. If I have never committed crimes, I have often been foolish and have committed faults, many of them deliberately, after the examination of which you speak. I should have been, according to you, perfectly placid and free from the reproach of conscience; however, the next morning I woke unhappy, tormented, often overwhelmed, and unable to stifle the mysterious voice that accused me."

"And in whose name did it speak, this voice, more vague than mysterious?"

"In the name of my conscience, evidently."

"'Evidently' is too much, and you would be puzzled if called upon to demonstrate this evidence; whereas, nothing is more uncertain and elusive than the thing that is called conscience, which is in reality only an affair of environment and of education."

"I do not understand."

"Does your conscience tell you it is a crime to love me?"

"No, decidedly."

"You see, then, that you have a personal way of understanding what is good and bad, which is not that of our country, where it is admitted, from the religious and from the social point of view, that a young girl is guilty when she has a lover. Of course, you see, also, that conscience is a bad weighing-machine, since each one, in order to make it work, uses a weight that he has himself manufactured."

"However it is, you did right not to strangle Cafflie."

"Whom you, yourself, have condemned to death."

"By the hand of justice, whether human or divine; but not by yours, any more than by Florentin's or mine, although we know better than any one that he does not deserve any mercy."

"And you see I foresaw your objections, as I did not tighten his cravat."

"Happily."

"Is it necessary to say 'happily'?"

CHAPTER X

SANIEL MAKES A RESOLUTION

This evening Phillis was obliged to be at home early, but she cleared off the table, and put everything in order before leaving.

"You can breakfast on the remains of the chicken," she said, as she put it in the pantry.

And as Saniel accompanied her with a candle in his hand, he saw that she had thought not only of his breakfast for the following day, but for many days, besides carrots for the rabbits.

"What a good heart you have!" he said.

"Because I think of the rabbits?"

"Because of your tenderness and thoughtfulness."

"I wish I could do something for you!"

As soon as she was gone he seated himself at his desk and began to work, anxious to make up for the time that he had given to sentiment. The fact that his work might not be of use to him, and that his experiments might

be rudely interrupted the next morning or in a few days, was not a sufficient reason for being idle. He had work to do, and he worked as if with the certitude that he would pass his examinations, and that his experiments of four years past would have a good ending, without interference from any one.

This was his strong point, this power to work, that was never disturbed or weakened by anything; not by pleasure or pain, by preoccupation or by misery. In the street he could think of Phillis, be he hungry or sleepy; at his desk he had no thought of Phillis, neither of hunger nor of sleep, no cares, no memories; his work occupied him entirely.

It was his strength, and also his pride, the only superiority of which he boasted; for although he knew that he had others, he never spoke of them, while he often said to his comrades:

"I work when I will and as much as I wish. My will never weakens when I am at work."

This evening he worked for about an hour, in his usual condition of mind; neither sheriffs, nor Jardine, nor Caffie troubled him. But having to draw upon his memory for certain facts, he found that it did not obey him as usual; there were a hesitation, a fogginess, above all, extraordinary wanderings. He wrestled with it and it obeyed, but only for a short time, and soon again it betrayed him a second time, then a third and fourth time.

Decidedly he was not in a normal state, and his will obeyed in place of commanding.

There were a name and a phrase that recurred to him mechanically from time to time. The name was Caffie, and the phrase was, "Nothing easier."

Why should this hypothesis to strangle Caffie, of which he had lightly spoken, and to which he had attached no importance at the moment when he uttered it, return to him in this way as a sort of obsession?

Was it not strange?

Never, until this day, had he had an idea that he could strangle a man, even as wicked as this one, and yet, in talking of it, he found very natural and legitimate reasons for the murder of this scamp.

Had not Phillis herself condemned him?

To tell the truth, she had added that Providence or justice should be his executor, but this was the scruple of a simple conscience, formed in a narrow environment, to which influence he would not submit.

Had he these scruples, this old man who coldly, and merely for the interest of so much a hundred on a dot, advised him to hasten the death of a woman by drunkenness, and that of an infant in any way he pleased?

When he reached this conclusion he stopped, and asked himself whether he were mad to pursue this idea; then immediately, to get rid of it, he set to work, which absorbed him for a certain time, but not so long a time as at first.

Then, finding that he could not control his will, he turned his thoughts to Caffie.

It was only too evident that if he had carried out the idea of strangling Caffie, all the difficulties against which he had struggled, and which would overwhelm him, if not the following day, at least in a few days, would have disappeared immediately.

No more sheriffs, no more creditors. What a deliverance!

Repose, the possibility of passing examinations with a calm spirit that the fever of material troubles would not disturb--in this condition he felt his success was assured.

And his experiments! He would run no danger of seeing them rudely interrupted. His preparations were not cast out-of-doors; his precious culture-tubes were not broken; his vases, his balloons, were not at the second-hand dealer's. He continued this train of thought to the results that he desired for him, glory; for humanity, the cure of one, and perhaps two, of the most terrible maladies with which it was afflicted.

The question was simple:

On one side, Caffie;

On the other side, humanity and science;

An old rascal who deserved twenty deaths, and who would, anyhow, die naturally in a short time;

And humanity, science, which would profit by a discovery of which he would be the author.

He saw that the perspiration stood out on his hands, and he felt it run down his neck.

Why this weakness? From horror of the crime, the possibility of which he admitted? Or from fear of seeing his experiments destroyed?

He would reflect, think about it, be upon his guard.

He had told Phillis that intelligent men, before engaging in an action, weigh the pro and con.

Against Caffie's death he saw nothing.

For, on the contrary, everything combined.

If he had had Phillis's scruples, or Brigard's beliefs, he would have stopped.

But, not having them, would he not be silly to draw back?

Before what should he shrink? Why should he stop?

Remorse? But he was convinced that intelligent men had no remorse when they came to a decision on good grounds. It was before that they felt remorse, not after; and he was exactly in this period of before.

Fear of being arrested? But intelligent men do not let themselves be arrested. Those who are lost are brutes who go straight ahead, or the half-intelligent, who use their skill and cunning to combine a complicated or romantic act, in which their hand is plainly seen. As for him, he was a man of science and precision, and he would not compromise himself by act or sentiment; there would be nothing to fear during the action, and nothing afterward. Caffie strangled, suspicion would not fall upon a doctor, but on a brute. When doctors wish to kill any one, they do it learnedly, by poison or by some scientific method. Brutal men kill brutally; murder, called the assassin's profession.

A few minutes before, he was inundated by perspiration; this word froze him.

He rose nervously, and walked up and down the room with long, unsteady steps. The fire had long since gone out; out-of-doors the street noises had ceased, and in his brain resounded the one word that he pronounced in a low tone, "Assassin!"

Was he the man to be influenced and stopped by a word? Where are the rich, the self-made men, the successful men, who have not left some corpses on the road behind them? Success carries them safely, and they achieved success only because they had force.

Certainly, violence was not recreation, and it would be more agreeable to go in his way peacefully, by the power of intelligence and work, than to make a way by blows; but he had not chosen this road, he was thrown into it by circumstances, by fate, and whoever wishes to reach the end cannot choose the means. If one must walk in the mud, what matters it, when one knows that one will not get muddy?

If Caffie had had heirs, poor people who expected to be saved from misery by inheriting his fortune, he would have been touched by this consideration, undoubtedly. Robber! The word was yet more vile than that of assassin. But who would miss the few banknotes that he would take from the safe? To steal is to injure some one. Whom would he injure? He could see no one. But he saw distinctly an army of afflicted persons whom he would benefit.

A timid ring of the bell made him start violently, and he was angry with himself for being so nervous, he who was always master of his mind as of his body.

He opened the door, and a man dressed like a laborer bowed humbly.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, sir."

"What do you want?"

"I called on account of my wife, if you will be so good as to come to see her."

"What is the matter with her?"

"She is about to be confined. The nurse does not know what to do, and sent me for a doctor."

"Did the nurse tell you to come for me?"

"No, sir; she sent me to Doctor Legrand."

"Well?"

"His wife told me he could not get up on account of his bronchitis. And the chemist gave me your address."

"That is right."

"I must tell you, sir, I am an honest man, but we are not rich; we could not pay you--immediately."

"I understand. Wait a few minutes."

Saniel took his instruments and followed the laborer, who, on the way, explained his wife's condition.

"Where are we going?" Saniel asked, interrupting these explanations.

"Rue de la Corderie."

It was behind the Saint Honore' market, on the sixth floor, under the roof, in a room that was perfectly clean, in spite of its poverty. As soon as Saniel entered the nurse came forward, and in a few words told him the woman's trouble.

"Is the child living?"

"Yes."

"That is well; let us see."

He approached the bed and made a careful examination of the patient, who kept repeating:

"I am going to die. Save me, doctor!"

"Certainly, we shall save you," he said, very softly. "I promise you."

He turned away from the bed and said to the nurse:

"The only way to save the mother is to kill the child."

The operation was long, difficult, and painful, and after it was over Saniel remained a long time with the patient. When he reached the street a neighboring clock struck five, and the market-place had already begun to show signs of life.

But in the streets was still the silence and solitude of night, and Saniel began to reflect on what had occurred during the last few hours. Thus, he had not hesitated to kill this child, who had, perhaps, sixty or seventy years of happy life before it, and he hesitated at the death of Caffie, to whom remained only a miserable existence of a few weeks. The interests of a poor, weak, stunted woman had decided him; his, those of humanity, left him perplexed, irresolute, weak, and cowardly. What a contradiction!

He walked with his eyes lowered, and at this moment, before him on the pavement, he saw an object that glittered in the glare of the gas. He approached it, and found that it was a butcher's knife, that must have been lost, either on going to the market or the slaughterhouse.

He hesitated a moment whether he should pick it up or leave it there; then looking all about him, and seeing no one in the deserted street, and hearing no sound of footsteps in the silence, he bent quickly and took it.

Caffie's fate was decided.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

As free from prejudices as one may be, one always retains a few
As ignorant as a schoolmaster
Confidence in one's self is strength, but it is also weakness
Conscience is a bad weighing-machine
Conscience is only an affair of environment and of education
Find it more easy to make myself feared than loved
Force, which is the last word of the philosophy of life
I believed in the virtue of work, and look at me!
Intelligent persons have no remorse
It is only those who own something who worry about the price
Leant--and when I did not lose my friends I lost my money
Leisure must be had for light reading, and even more for love
People whose principle was never to pay a doctor
Power to work, that was never disturbed or weakened by anything
Reason before the deed, and not after

Will not admit that conscience is the proper guide of our action

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by Hector Malot

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